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POPE: HEAVEN'S JOYS CAN START ON EARTH

Says Faithful Are Called to Imitate Mary

CASTEL GANDOLFO, Italy, AUG. 17, 2009 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- Heavenly joy can begin on earth by answering God's call to share in a relationship similar to the mysterious interchange that occurred between Christ and Mary, says Benedict XVI.

The Pope spoke of the parallel between Jesus and his mother -- "Mary has been 'elevated' to the place from which the Son had 'come down'" -- in his Angelus address Sunday at Castel Gandolfo. The Holy Father noted how Saturday was the feast of the Assumption of Our Lady, while the Gospel reading for Sunday spoke of Jesus, the living bread that came down from heaven.

"We cannot remain indifferent to this parallel, which revolves around the symbol of 'heaven,'" he said. "Naturally this biblical language expresses with figurative terminology something that does not entirely enter into the world of our concepts and images. But, let us pause for a moment to reflect."

The Pontiff went on to note how Jesus is the living bread, "the true nourishment that gives life," but that his earthly body was received from the Virgin Mary.

"God took from her a human body to enter into our mortal human condition," the Bishop of Rome explained. "In turn, at the end of an earthly existence, the body of the Virgin was taken to heaven by God and brought to enter into the celestial condition."

"Dear brothers and sisters," he continued, "what happened to Mary is also valid, though in a different but real way, for every man and woman, because God asks each of us to welcome him, to place at his disposal our hearts and our bodies, the whole of our existence, our flesh -- as the Bible says -- so that he can dwell in the world."

"He calls us to unite ourselves with him in the sacrament of the Eucharist, Bread broken for the life of the world, to together form the Church, his Body in history," the Pope added. "And if we say 'yes,' like Mary, in the same measure of this our 'yes,' this mysterious interchange will also happen for us and in us: We will be assumed into the dignity of the One who has assumed our humanity."

Benedict XVI affirmed that the Eucharist is the "instrument of this reciprocal transformation."

"He is the Head and we are the members. He is the Vine and we the branches," he said. "Whoever eats of this Bread and lives in communion with Jesus, allowing himself to be transformed by him and in him, is saved from eternal death: Certainly this person will die as everyone does, participating as well in the mystery of the passion and the cross of Christ, but he is no longer a slave of death and he will be raised up on the last day to enjoy the eternal feast with Mary and all the saints."

Finally, the Holy Father assured, this "feast of God" begins on earth.

"It is a mystery of faith, hope and love, which is celebrated in the liturgy, especially the Eucharistic [liturgy], and is expressed in fraternal communion and service to our neighbor. Let us," he concluded, "ask the holy Virgin to help us to always with faith nourish ourselves on the Bread of eternal life to experience already on earth the joy of heaven."